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Office of Community Engagement presents awards for community involvement

Summary: The awards honor students, faculty, staff, and community partners who created or supported exemplary partnerships with the broader community.

(May 20, 2011)-The University of Minnesota, Morris (UMM) Office of Community Engagement presented awards at an end-of-the-year celebration to students, faculty, staff, and community partners who created or supported exemplary partnerships with the broader community.

Community Partner Award

Community Partner Lisa Denzer of Legacy Living was honored with this year's Community Partner Award. For 11 years, Denzer has partnered with UMM English classes on a project titled "Voices from the Prairie." Through this partnership, first at West Wind Village, where she served as activity director, and then at Legacy Living, more than 500 UMM students and 100 Morris community elders have shared stories that have been recorded in the form of "found poetry" shared with the elders' families.

Denzer was instrumental in starting the program, writing a student handbook, training students to participate, and assisting with logistics and oversight. Lisa has also participated in additional UMM partnerships. Annie Olson '04, who worked closely with Denzer during the first four years of the project, nominated Denzer. In her nomination, Annie wrote, "The project had a profound impact on me and how I understand education and community engagement. I am now working on developing a similar program in New Mexico, where I am attending graduate school."

Faculty Award for Service Learning

Faculty member Ray Schultz received the Faculty Award for Service Learning. Schultz, one of UMM's pioneer service-learning practitioners, has offered Creative Dramatics with Children as a service-learning course for 11 years, since the inception of UMM's service-learning program. The course gives UMM students, most of them education majors, an opportunity to learn how to use drama to teach core subjects and other skills. He partners with multiple school districts in the region. His anonymous nominator wrote, "Ray has been a steady, unwavering dedication to service-learning as a pedagogy despite changes in state standards, school schedules, and other complications over the last 10 years. While many faculty try service learning, few view it as central to their teaching as Ray does. He was doing service learning before there was an infrastructure at UMM to support the logistics and assist with student training and reflection."

Faculty/Staff Community Engagement Award

Jennifer and Troy Goodnough received the Faculty/Staff Community Engagement Award. This award goes to a faculty or staff person who has supported the Office of Community Engagement's work and served as role models for engagement outside of their job descriptions. The Goodnoughs have participated consistently in service projects alongside students and community partners at such events as all-campus service days and Relay for Life. They always go above and beyond the call of duty for food, book, and toy drives. "Unlike so many of us, myself included, the Goodnoughs never use the excuse of being busy or overwhelmed with the responsibilities of their jobs or family when

they are called upon to serve the broader community,” said Argie Manolis, coordinator of community engagement. Jennifer is an associate professor of chemistry, and Troy is the campus sustainability coordinator.

Student Service Learning Award

Senior Laura Weldy, Oakdale, is the recipient of the Student Service Learning Award, given to a student who has shown a dedication to course-based service-learning projects and has used them as a springboard for continued engagement. Weldy participated in a service-learning course in her Sociology of Gender and Sexuality course, and she continued to work on the project after the course was complete. She went on to serve as a teaching assistant for the course in subsequent years. The course includes several group community-based research projects and requires a great deal of oversight of multiple projects in different stages of development. Weldy brought her organizational skills to the work. Jennifer Rothchild, associate professor of sociology, who nominated Weldy, wrote, “Laura is deeply engaged in the community in multiple ways, using her academic knowledge to better understand and respond to the challenges she sees in the broader community.”

First-Year Student Community Engagement Award

Megan Trumper, Stillwater, received the First-Year Student Community Engagement Award, designed to reward first-year students for a high level of engagement and encourage continued engagement. Trumper is a teaching assistant at Country Day, part of a Students in Service Americorps program that places UMM students in local community agencies and organizations. Trumper’s placement does not include a living stipend she is donating 300 hours this year to the organization. She also tutors in the Tutoring, Reading, and Enabling Children (TREC) program, and has made recommendations for ways to improve students’ literacy based on research conducted in her Intellectual Community course. Trumper has also participated in all the available UMM-sponsored service days, including the Fall and Martin Luther Days of Service and the Community Meal. Trumper was nominated by one of her peers, Taylor Parlato, who was inspired by her work in the community.

All-Student Community Engagement Award

Seniors Yuri Machkasov, Morris, and Abe Henry, Hastings, were awarded the All-Student Community Engagement Award. Their nominator, Stacey Aronson, associate professor of Spanish, points to Henry’s founding and Machkasov’s nurturing of the Plan Amistad English Language Tutoring and Emergency Interpretation Services Program, which offers free English tutoring and interpretation services to Spanish-speaking residents of the region. The volunteer group has expanded to a three-level, three-day-a-week class that involves, as Stacey writes, “a cadre of UMM volunteers and a loyal entourage of Spanish-speaking students who enjoy their friendship both in and outside of tutoring sessions.” Yuri helped to expand these efforts by creating a soccer league that includes UMM students and Spanish-speaking residents, as well as planning a Cinco de Mayo fundraiser for community integration efforts for new immigrants, which drew more than 300 people and was a great success.

“The Office of Community Engagement involved 622 students in partnerships with 42 community organizations this year,” said Argie Manolis. “Because so many students, community partners, faculty, and staff are doing so much, it can be difficult to tell the story of community engagement at UMM. My hope is that by lifting up a few exemplary stories, others will be inspired to take their current engagement to a new level.” She added, “There were so many people deserving of these awards, and that, too, is encouraging.”

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